

BACH:
The Art of Fugue

Personnel of Hart House Orchestra

1ST VIOLIN	Andrew Benac, <i>Concertmaster</i> Clifford Evens Pearl Palmason Morris Biniowsky
2ND VIOLIN	Isidor Desser Anthony Ginter Terry Helmer Vera Tarnowsky
VIOLA	Stanley Solomon Robert Warburton
CELLO	Ronald Laurie Don Whitton
BASS	Cameron G. MacKay
	<i>Assisted by:</i>
FLUTE	Robert Aitken
OBOE	Stanley Wood
COR ANGLAIS	Harry Freedman
BASSOON	Elver Wahlberg Wayland Mosher

University of Toronto
The Faculty of Music

SPECIAL EVENTS

1962-1963

In the Concert Hall of
The Edward Johnson Building

THE HART HOUSE ORCHESTRA

BOYD NEEL, *conductor*

GRETA KRAUS, *harpsichordist*

Thursday evening at 8.30
December 6, 1962

PROGRAM

1. *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* J. S. Bach
Greta Kraus, harpsichord
2. *The Art of Fugue, part one*
J. S. Bach, arr. Isaacs

CONTRAPUNCTUS I

The first four *contrapuncti* (or fugues: Bach uses here the more scholarly Latin name for a piece in fugal style) are simple "episode fugues"—that is, they are like free rondos, circular in form, alternating recurrences of the main tune (or "subject") with "episodes", whether digressive or developmental. To familiarize us with the subject in its purest form, Bach writes first a smooth-flowing fugue in which no other theme competes, and in which the episodes are deliberately kept sombre and neutral in color. The chordal build-up and the silence before the final entry of the subject together typify Bach's way of suggesting the culmination point of a fugal construction.

CONTRAPUNCTUS II

Though similar in purpose to No. I, this fugue announces the variational purpose of *The Art of Fugue* in its already considerable contrast of mood. The rhythmic march-beat or snap, shown in the last few notes of the subject here, pervades the entire piece. Towards the end the subject appears in a syncopated entry.

CONTRAPUNCTUS III

This new variation, built on the inversion of the subject (see Ex. 2 at the end of the program), is chromatic: a counter-subject of gliding semitones accompanies the subject at almost every appearance, and the episodes, rather than remain neutral and amorphous, also begin to assume character, by repeating a climbing semitone motive.

CONTRAPUNCTUS IV

The most extensive of the episode fugues is a piece of extraordinary symmetry. The entries of the subject (inverted again) are grouped in fours: a group of four entries in D minor; then four entries starting in the major key; then four entries each of which ingeniously twists the subject into a higher key; then two paired entries in which voices overlap each other in close syncopation; only in the final section are there two, not four, entries of the subject. But the expansiveness of the fugue lies mainly in the episodes—which are long, sectionalized, tightly interrelated, and show several themes which vie with the subject in interest (chief among these

is a soft, Couperinesque, "cuckoo" motive). A curious aspect of this many-dimensional fugue is that the main cadences occur not at the ends of entry-groups but in the middle of episodes.

CONTRAPUNCTUS V

The next three variations demonstrate the many ways in which the subject may overlap itself—make "rounds" with itself—in what traditionally is called "stretto". Hence these are termed stretto-fugues. The first one is mostly concerned with playing the subject and its inversion in various two-part stretti, but there are two passages of "free stretto" where the opening subject-motive is heard in all four voices in excited close-range. At the end, subject and inversion appear *simultaneously* for the first time.

CONTRAPUNCTUS VI

This variation has the rhythmic character of a pompously ornate Lullian overture—as Bach suggests in his sub-heading "*in Stile francese*". The stretti this time involve subject, inversion, and the diminutions of both—that is, their presentation in note-values twice as quick as normal. The diminution is heard against the normal rhythmic version at the very opening, for identification purposes. The "francese" element consists in the exaggerated dotted-note rhythms and in the very quick upbeat version given of the much-exploited final motive of the subject, a four-note scale.

CANON PER AUGMENTATIONEM IN CONTRARIO MOTU

Inserted at different places in the various *Art of Fugue* manuscripts are four canons based on highly florid variations of the main subject. Although Bach had already provided an exhaustive guide to canonic procedures in *The Musical Offering* and the *Goldberg Variations*, it is possible he envisioned incorporating a complete set of canons in *The Art of Fugue* as well, but lived to write only these four. The four canons are valuable more for the beauty of their references to the subject than for their contrapuntal ingenuities. This first one, for example, decorates the subject with graceful rhythmic turns and a notable chromatic inflection. The piece is in two voices only, and the lower repeats the melody of the upper exactly, but in inversion and in notes of double length. Halfway through, they reverse roles in the exact same scheme. D. F. Tovey suggested placing the piece as an introduction to the third of the stretto fugues at this point.

CONTRAPUNCTUS VII

This fugue is entirely concerned with stretti on subject and inversion in three different time-values—regular, double-fast, and double-slow, or, to give the technical terms, regular, diminution, and augmentation. (Tovey also claimed to hear a reference in quadruple-fast time). The most prominent version, to the ear, is the augmentation, whose four repetitions form the structural girders of the fugue—rising through the texture from low bass to tenor, to alto, finally emerging to the surface in the soprano. At

every appearance, it is the prominent voice, like a droning medieval cantus-firmus, but the other rhythmic versions sounding against it spin round it and bump against it like whirlpools.

CANON ALLA OTTAVA

This is like a two-part canonic invention, or a gigue strayed in from one of the keyboard suites. The voices exactly imitate each other's actions, which involve a bouncy variant applied to both subject and inversion.

CONTRAPUNCTUS VIII

From episode-fugues and stretto-fugues we now move to a group of multiple-subject fugues—where the main subject combines not with itself but with other highly characterized themes. This, the first of the four fugues of this type in *The Art of Fugue*, is such an immense work in itself, even though in three voices rather than four, that it forms a convenient climax and breathing-point in the complete performance. The plan shows four clear-cut sections—the first exposing Subject A, the second exposing Subject B in conjunction with Subject A, the third exposing Subject C in conjunction with Subject B, and the fourth and final section presenting five of the six possible vertical arrangements in which Subjects A, B, and C may be played together. The structure is clarified by the decorative formal cadences which mark each of its turning-points. The three subjects are contrasted according to Bach's frequent practice in triple counterpoint: we observe that A has long notes arranged in a sharp and sometimes chromatic profile, and B has a repeating pattern of flowing short notes, while C (the variant of the main subject shown in our Ex. 3) has notes of intermediate length and a more vocal character.

INTERMISSION

3. *The Art of Fugue, part two*

J. S. Bach, arr. Isaacs

CANON ALLA DUODECIMA IN CONTRAPUNTO ALLA QUINTA

This canon uses the same device of double counterpoint at the twelfth which forms the basis for Contrapunctus IX, to follow. The two parts follow each other at the distance of a twelfth, but when they reverse roles, at the halfway point, they are an octave apart instead, thus forming a new set of harmonies and interval-progressions. Again the rhythmic variation of the subject is imaginative and vigorous.

CONTRAPUNCTUS IX

Another new subject, starting with an octave leap and a scale, is heard by itself and then in combination with a severely-intoned version of the original subject. The positions "at the twelfth" again show subtle harmonic colors in the combination of the two themes.

CANON ALLA DECIMA, CONTRAPUNTO ALLA TERZA

The theme is heard in a synocopated variant which answers itself first at the tenth, and then, in a reverse position of the two voices, at the octave. Suggesting the performing intentions of the piece, Bach originally left a pause towards the end for an improvised cadenza by the keyboardist.

CONTRAPUNCTUS X

This double fugue is the counterpart of No. IX, showing the combination of two themes—one of them the main subject, the other new—in double counterpoint at the tenth. The new subject, heard by itself at the start, is a wistful melody, of hesitant rhythm. The combinations in the later parts of the fugue, as a result of the particular device used, involve doublings of both subjects, now in thirds, now in sixths—a feature which imparts unusual resonance to the piece. Quite apart from its main structural intentions, the fugue shows an expressiveness of subsidiary lines and of episode material which has no parallel in *The Art of Fugue*, save perhaps in No. IV.

CONTRAPUNCTUS XI

This is a second triple fugue, paralleling No. VIII, and crowning this group of multiple-subject fugues. The sheer science of *The Art of Fugue* reaches its highest peak since No. VII here: but not only does Bach make his triple fugue out of the inversions of all three themes used in No. VIII; he also incorporates references to the chromatic episode-motive of No. III. It becomes a sort of dramatic gathering-together of the whole *Art of Fugue* argument. In order to make the inversions convincing, Bach includes a fourth voice in the fugue, which he did not use in No. VIII. An important subsidiary function is claimed by rising and falling chromatic-

scale lines throughout the fugue. Though just as clearly delineated by formal cadences as No. VIII, the piece is less declamatory than its counterpart; its mood is more transcendental, perhaps because of the pervasive chromaticism and the cumulative theme-references noted.

CONTRAPUNCTUS XII: (a) RECTUS; (b) INVERSUS

The Art of Fugue has not yet exhausted, it appears, all the possible treatments which may be applied to a single subject in this style. Here Bach presents the first of two "mirror-fugues"—fugues in which the entire three-voice structure will make equal sense if played in an upside-down order of both the voices and their lines. Both possible positions of the piece are heard, the original and then the "reflection." In some of the *Art of Fugue* autographs, Bach wrote this first mirror-fugue out again and added a fourth, non-inverting, voice to both Rectus and Inversus, marking these as versions to be played on two keyboards—the only reference to specific performance-realization in his score. But only the three-part versions are being played on this occasion.

CONTRAPUNCTUS XIII: (a) RECTUS; (b) INVERSUS

If the first mirror-fugue is a gigue, the second is a sarabande. This fugue reverts to the original, severe, unadorned version of the subject, in long notes, but in a different metre (three long beats to the bar rather than four moderate ones).

CONTRAPUNCTUS XIV

This is a quadruple fugue, with inversion and some strettis—at least, that was its *intended* scheme of structure, by all accounts; we possess only the first three sections out of the four or possibly five Bach planned to write. Subject A begins like the main *Art of Fugue* subject, but continues with a simpler, less songful, contour. Besides appearing in stretto, it is also inverted, and its unfolding amounts almost to a complete fugue in itself. Subject B, like that of the triple fugues (VIII and XI) is in quicker, more flowing notes. Subject C (see Ex. 4) is chromatic in flavor and begins with the notes B-flat, A, C, B-natural, which spell BACH in German notation. This is the only occasion where Bach himself used this motive, though many later composers (Liszt, Schumann, Busoni, Schoenberg, Dallapiccola) have employed it in homage to him. It also appears here in inverted form, in stretto with itself, and in combination with A and B. Subject D, it seems clearly indicated, would have been the main *Art of Fugue* subject, which will combine with the existing three subjects of this fugue. But at bar 239 the music abruptly breaks off and there appears a note from the composer's son, C. P. E. Bach: "At this fugue, where the name BACH was brought in as a Counter-subject, the composer passed away."

CHORALE-PRELUDE: VOR DEINER THRON TRET ICH HIERMIT

The *Art of Fugue* score originally contained this chorale-prelude, said to have been dictated by Bach in his last illness, when his sight was failing badly. Though unrelated to *The Art of Fugue*, it forms a convenient epilogue to it. A chorale melody of four simple phrases in the upper voice is surrounded by little imitations, mostly in quicker note-values, of so smooth, natural, and expressive a quality as to belie their deeply schematic origins. This is a touching miniature example of what *The Art of Fugue* demonstrates on such a monumental scale: the conflict of scientific restriction and artistic freedom which is the explosive source of Bach's genius.

—commentary by John Beckwith.

The Art of Fugue

The incomplete *Art of Fugue* is regarded as the culmination of Bach's contrapuntal skill, and Bach himself as the culmination of an epoch. This is indeed quite true, but if stated too briefly, it can, like so many quick generalizations, lead to a false estimate of the epoch and of the work itself.

It was as natural for the musician of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to think in terms of horizontal musical line as it was for later composers to think in terms of melody and vertical harmony. In the latter case contrapuntal polyphony became a device to be used for a definite purpose in a particular place—for example, in the famous last movement of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*—or in the fugues of Brahms (where the form is deliberately chosen for its cumulative effect or for its religious associations) or in the last movement of Vaughan Williams' *Fourth Symphony*.

Up to 1700 or a little later, however, polyphony was to a large extent the stuff of which music was made; the current language in which it was possible to give expression to all shades of feeling. The fugue was eventually the most highly organized form of

musical speech, and was capable of a vast range of mood.

To a giant of Bach's stature, whose improvisations must have been as impressive as the compositions which he committed to paper, the idea that fugue was merely a mathematical exercise or study must have been unthinkable. Many of the most expressive and impressive of Bach's works or movements are cast in the form of canons or fugues. They range from the gaiety of the C sharp major Fugue (No. 3 of the *Forty-Eight*) or the simplicity of the G major in Book Two, to the gigantic fugues in the *B minor Mass* or the six-part *Ricercare* in *The Musical Offering*.

That one must practice in order to attain perfection is evident, and that Bach in his maturity should use a particular subject to demonstrate what the writing of a fugue meant, is understandable. He was the great master. But by the time he was writing *The Art of Fugue*, his son Carl Philipp Emanuel was, to the public's satisfaction, developing a newer kind of music in which counterpoint played a subservient part. The fact that, as far as composition was concerned, father

Johann Sebastian came thus to be regarded as something of a fossil, robbed several generations of his music; but we, who are familiar with it, need not be led into the mistake of regarding him as fossilized in any degree whatever. The forms which he chose to continue using, and in particular the fugue, did not constitute a hindrance to the expression of his thoughts; rather were they the most compelling in which these thoughts could be couched.

It is astonishing that so great an admirer of Bach as Parry should have considered *The Art of Fugue* "not for performance" because it contained no direct instructions as to instrumentation. The fact that one of the invertible fugues was arranged by Bach himself for two cembali (including the almost superhuman feat of adding a fourth part to the existing three) shows that one fugue was performed, or at least prepared for performance. And if one, why not all?

The question of the type of transcription proper to this work is a separate issue, one for the discussion of which a program-note is scarcely a suitable place. Suffice it to say that those transcriptions in existence include full orchestral versions (of which Graeser's was the first), simpler arrangements for strings, and the keyboard versions by Prof. Tovey. My study of the work convinced me that *The Art of Fugue* could properly be brought within the bounds of chamber music on a somewhat wider basis than a string quartet, and that the interplay of woodwind and string tone would enable the contrapuntal lines to be clearly heard while the variety of colors thus made available would serve to point the subject-entries in an aesthetically more appropriate manner than by mere emphasis—all the more so because those very instrumental colors are all contemporary with Bach, and

can be found in his own scores. . . .

. . . There remains the unquestionable greatness of this wonderful music—whose composer uses every contrapuntal device as a means of expression and not as an end in itself. Bach once said that "Musik sei zur Ehre Gottes und zur Erbauung der Menschheit"—and this is no less true of *The Art of Fugue* than of any other of his works—that it sound forth "to the honor of God and for the uplifting of Mankind".

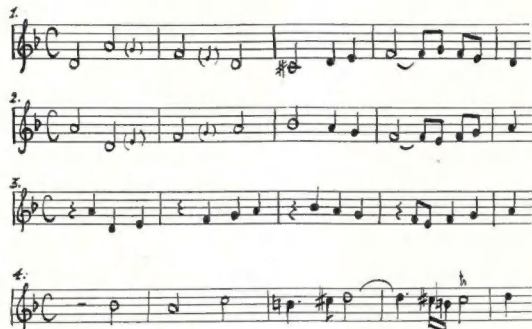
—from a program-note by the transcriber, Leonard Isaacs.

Note

For this performance, we wished to include the unfinished final Fugue which Mr. Isaacs omits in his version. I have taken upon myself the task of arranging it for orchestra in a manner which will, I hope, blend with Mr. Isaacs' overall scheme.

The inclusion of the unfinished Fugue always raises problems as to how the performance should end. There are three alternatives. One can play the unfinished Fugue with an ending written by somebody else, which, to me, is inconceivable as a homage to Bach. On the other hand, the performance can finish where Bach laid down his pen. This is certainly a very dramatic way. The third alternative is to adopt Philipp Emanuel's suggestion of playing the Chorale Prelude for Organ "Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit". This was Bach's last composition which he dictated to his son-in-law on his death bed. Wolfgang Graeser adopts this plan in his celebrated orchestral arrangement, and, in tonight's performance, we have decided to do the same. I again take responsibility for the arrangement of the Chorale Prelude.

Boyd Neel



Exs. 1 and 2 show the subject of *The Art of Fugue*, and its inversion. Small notes in brackets indicate added notes used first in Contrapunctus III and then regularly from Contrapunctus V on.

Ex. 3 shows the rhythmic variant of the inversion, used in the triple fugue, Contrapunctus VIII. This is applied in the "subject" position in Contrapunctus XI.

Ex. 4 shows the third theme of the incomplete Contrapunctus XIV, starting with four notes which spell the composer's name.

The picture appearing on the title page is a contemporary portrait of Bach owned by Dr. Hendrik Baron van Tuyll von Serooskerken, at present on loan to the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto.

The crest, enlarged from a signet ring once owned by Bach, shows the initials JSB entwined with their own reflection.